

Blue Willow



PRESSKIT

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L S A L E S

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N E W Z E A L A N D F I L M

Essential Information

Writer/Director	Veialu Aila-Unsworth
Producer	Veialu Aila-Unsworth
Film Format:	35mm
Video Format:	SP Beta 4:3 format
Sound:	Stereo Tracks 1 & 2
Running Time	13 Mins 57 Secs
Country of Production	New Zealand
Date of completion	2005
Sales	Juliette Veber, New Zealand Film Commission email juliette@nzfilm.co.nz Tel: +64 4 382 7686

Log Line

Blue Willow is a totally unique and charming animated film about Koong-se, the beautiful daughter of a rich Chinese mandarin.

Short Synopsis

The 13-minute film is an animated proverb that takes you into the heart of a porcelain plate, bringing the blue lines of life and weaving a haunting story of love and family betrayal.

Festival Screenings

2005 New Zealand International Film Festival, New Zealand
2006 Clermont Ferrand International Film Festival – Market Screening, France
2006 Granada International Short Film Festival, Spain
2006 IndieLisboa Lisbon Independent Film Festival, Portugal
2006 56th Berlin International Film Festival, Germany
2006 Mo&Frieze Hamburg Children’s Short Film Festival, Germany
2006 Rimouski International Youth Festival, Canada
2006 Wairoa Maori Film Festival, New Zealand
2006 Brisbane International Film Festival, Australia
2006 Lola Kenya Screen Festival, Kenya
2006 Mill Valley Film Festival, USA
2006 Chicago International Children’s Film Festival, USA
2006 Magma Short Film Festival, New Zealand
2006 Show Me Shorts Film Festival, New Zealand
2006 ImagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival, Canada
2006 ALEKINO! International Young Audience Film Festival, Poland
2006 Cinema K: Seattle Children’s Film Festival, USA
2007 Alaska Native Film Festival, Alaska

Director's Notes – 'Veialu Aila-Unsworth'

I have eaten many a hot meal off this plate design - either at my Great Aunt's or during a student-flat dinner. It still makes me laugh to think that such an elegant plate, with such a beautiful story, would find itself being smothered by left over macaroni and cheese or fish pie.

So for me, this plate carries more than just the Blue Willow legend; it may be Chinese in flavour, but the film actually says more about Kiwiana culture. Like the enigmatic Mona Lisa, Virgin Mary or Maori Tiki, the Willow pattern has its own kitsch great-grandchildren subverting those older perspectives of the world - all those insistent 'isms': Imperialism, Orientalism, Capitalism, Feminism and so on. The plate holds several histories.

This is my first animated film and it took 12 months to make - from writing the first draft to the final sound mix. The genre is a collision of many things - absurdism, magic realism, the ridiculous, the crude, the dangerous, the quiet, the absolute, the gorgeous, the surreal, the mischievous. Yet all this freedom meant many more decisions had to be made - one of the most challenging parts of this project was settling on a "look" and not being seduced by all the exciting possibilities of, say, Japanese Anime, classic Warner Bros or stop motion with clay or puppets. Many months passed before we finally chose our leading lady's face.

I also tried experimenting with combining the techniques I have learnt in the theatre with the skills I have as a filmmaker; this became very useful when it came to developing the character's vocal performance.

This film grew from my own desire to answer the question: what is that enduring quality, that original elegance which inspired Thomas Minton to design this plate 300 years ago? The same thing that inspired me to make this film.

Director's Bio

Born in Papua New Guinea, Veialu moved to Tauranga in New Zealand with her mother when she was four. Today she lives in Wellington with her Czech partner Michal. Earlier this year she completed her Masters degree, studying theatre directing at NZ Drama School and Victoria University of Wellington. This included making a 20-minute documentary on other Papua New Guineans living in Wellington and their experience with immigration. She hopes to develop this film later in the year. Veialu also lived in Auckland where she completed a Degree in Communication Studies, and then worked as a Promotions Director at TV3 where she stayed for 2 years. During this time she was also accepted into "The School of Ideas" as a creative copywriter.

Sydney has been her other home - before moving to Wellington, she worked for 3 years at the Aussie TV Network, Channel Ten (the makers of Rove Live, Neighbours, Big Brother, and Australian Idol). During this time she won an Australasian Gold Promax Media Award for a TV campaign she directed for the Australian Aria Music Awards, which starred Rove McManus and well-known Australian bands. When she is not working on her film projects, Veialu is a journalist for two community newspapers in Wellington.

History – ‘The Blue Willow Pattern’

For almost two centuries the Willow pattern has been the most popular design in Western pottery.

The term "Willow" is applied in a general way to many of the copies of the blue-and-white porcelain imported into England from China during the last half of the eighteenth century. Many believe that this legend is actually English in origin and not Chinese, others argue that it was told in China 2000 years ago and bought to England by the Crusaders.

The short animated New Zealand film *Blue Willow* is based on the plate *Blue Willow* which depicts the charming old Chinese legend of an angry father pursuing his eloping daughter, only to see the maiden and her lover transformed into birds who fly away together.

This story was first told in poems of travelling storytellers several thousands of years ago. In the late 1700's the famous English ceramic manufacturers Staffordshire's Coalport Pottery Works decided to depict the pattern on some chinaware. It was an overnight sensation and over the years hundreds of firms copied the pattern. The designer Thomas Minton (1765-1836) developed and engraved the design at a time when the craze for Chinese things was at its height. He was an apprentice potter at the time. Today avid collectors will pay thousands of dollars to own the early or famous examples of the *Blue Willow* pattern.

Through the years, manufacturers have produced *Red Willow*, *Green Willow* and even *Brown Willow*, but the original *Cobalt Blue* color has always been the most prized version to collectors.

Press Clippings / Reviews

"bordering somewhere between dream, myth and critical reality, the films of wellington artist veialu aila-unsworth question ideas of culture, identity, time and space. Spurred by a deep personal search, aila-unsworth goes beyond the surface of mythology to tell stories that affirm and connect."

- whitefungus magazine, august 2005

"enchanting...its 'true-love almost conquers all' tale has extra dimensions exploring family loyalty and the traditional lot of daughters in China; and it sends itself up with a delicious surprise comic ending."

- real groove magazine, july 2005

CAST AND CREW

voice of koong-se – jing he

Jing is originally from Haikou, the capital of Hainan Island, off the coast of mainland China.

She lives in Wellington with her husband and manages one of Wellington city's most successful university student hostels.

voice of chang & father – dan caddy

Dan will graduate in November 2005 from New Zealand's prestigious Toi Whakaari NZ Drama School.

Wellingtonian's will have seen him in numerous stage productions as well as a featured role

on one of New Zealand's hottest TV drama series "The Strip".

voice of taji & live action - thomas beauchamp

Tom will also graduate in November 2005 from New Zealand's prestigious Toi Whakaari NZ Drama School.

As well as a theatre director, Tom is an accomplished actor and circus performer. He moved to Wellington after eight years in London.

voice development

The voices for the film Blue Willow were developed in a workshop using Roy Heart/Bert van Dyke theatrical techniques at Victoria University of Wellington with actors Dan Caddy,

Tsz Hung-Wong, Allan Henry and Gareth Williams.

director, screenplay, illustrations & camera - veialu aila-unsworth

Papua New Guinean born Veialu developed the animated film Blue Willow over twelve months. During this time she also directed several other productions as part of a Masters degree at Victoria University of Wellington and Toi Whakaari NZ Drama School, including a musical cabaret and silent film screening, and a short documentary about a Pacific Island minority group in NZ.

original music, sound design & musical performance - tim beals

South Auckland born Tim is one of NZ's up and coming young composers.

After graduating in music composition at Victoria University of Wellington last year, he now shares his time between playing in his band, writing music and working for the popular NZ music label, Loop.

Tim plays a number of instruments including cello, guitar and keyboard.

He worked for ten months with Veialu on Blue Willow.

digital director - mark d'ath

(including digital painting, animation, editing, compositing)

A keen skateboarder, Mark lives in Wellington and is currently specialising in 2-D animation; he works for an established cartoon company, Looney Tunes. He also studied 3-D animation and for his graduating project for Massey University School of Design, he developed 3-D software to assist the hearing impaired to lip read. For Blue Willow, Mark spent six weeks creating the final animation on Adobe After Effects.

traditional cell animation - tom simpson

Tom moved from his family farm in Omaru to study design in Wellington. At the end of 2005 he will finish his final year at Massey University as an outstanding artist, animator and design student. In the film, Tom had to draw 27 different images on different pages for every second of footage in order to animate the flying dragon, the tear drop that transforms into the butterfly, and the roasted duck being torn apart. He then photographed each page which were later put together in the computer. The result is a beautiful old-school style of animation - the same technique used in the first animated films

concept artist & storyboard - dave bat

Dave is a talented freelance illustrator and writer. He has worked for a variety of magazines, illustrating promotional posters and specialises in designing images of popular culture. He currently lives on Wellington's beautiful South Coast with his partner.

sound mixer - phill adam

Phill is the studio manager and sound mixer at Matrix Digital - a very successful sound design company based on Webb Street in Wellington. Besides local short films, Phill has recently worked on a number of advertising campaigns as well as the albums of some of NZ's best bands including Rhombus, Kora and Hot Club Sandwich

A film made with the kind support of Creative NZ and the NZ Film Commission, Toi Whakaari NZ Drama School and Victoria University of Wellington Theatre Programme.

